

THE STOLEN COUNTRY

*How the Game at the Top Empties Everything at the
Bottom*

A Citizen's Investigation

*⚠ Every factual claim in this book carries a citation.
Allegations are labelled as allegations. Proven facts are labelled as facts.*

INTRODUCTION: The Distance Between Two Indias

"A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members."
— Mahatma Gandhi

Somewhere in India, a solar park stretches across land that once grew crops. The farmer who worked that land received a compensation letter, a cheque worth less than two years of what the soil would have earned, and a polite instruction to vacate. Somewhere in Mumbai, a quarterly earnings call celebrates record infrastructure revenues.

These two moments happen in the same country, under the same government, protected by the same laws. This is not coincidence. This is a system.

India ranks 102nd out of 123 countries on hunger. It is the world's 5th largest economy. That gap is not an accident — it is a policy outcome.

This book follows the money — from the contract award to the empty plate, from the budget line item to the shuttered clinic, from the solar farm boundary to the displaced family. It does not claim every contract is corrupt. It claims something simpler and more dangerous: that a system designed to serve 1.4 billion people has been quietly, legally, and continuously reoriented to serve a much smaller number.

India's public debt servicing runs into tens of lakh crore rupees annually. Every rupee of that debt was borrowed against India's future — against the farmer in Vidarbha, the daily wage worker in Patna, the child going to school on an empty stomach. When that debt finances projects awarded through opaque processes to politically connected conglomerates, it stops being development. It becomes a transfer.

This book is about that transfer. It is written not in anger, but in accountability. Not as prosecution, but as inquiry. Because in a

democracy, the citizen is the employer. And employers have the right to ask where their money went.

[1] Global Hunger Index 2025: India ranks 102nd out of 123 countries.
globalhungerindex.org/india.html

[2] India GDP ranking: World Bank National Accounts Data, 2024. data.worldbank.org

CHAPTER 1: THE FOOD THEFT

How Agricultural Policy Fails the People Who Grow Our Food

*"The farmer who feeds the nation goes to bed
hungry."*

— P. Sainath, journalist

1.1 THE PROMISE AND THE REALITY

Every year before the sowing season, the government announces the Minimum Support Price — the floor price at which it promises to buy farmers' crops. It is announced in newspapers, on All India Radio, cited proudly in parliamentary speeches. It sounds like a guarantee. For most of India's farmers, it is not.

Awareness among farmers of the existence of an MSP is poor at just 23%. Only about 20-25% of wheat and paddy produce across India is actually sold at MSP.*

The gap between promise and reality is measurable. While the government declared the MSP for paddy at ₹2,040 per quintal for the 2023-24 kharif season, farmers in eastern India received only ₹1,600-1,800 per quintal from private buyers — due to procurement bottlenecks the government failed to fix.*

The reason is structural. The government's own formula for calculating MSP — using what is called the A2+FL cost — deliberately excludes the imputed rental value of owned land and interest on owned capital. Farmers and agricultural economists have long demanded a shift to the C2 formula, which includes these real costs.

Even using the government's own CACP computation of C2 costs for paddy, the MSP should have been ₹2,866 per quintal. The announced MSP based on A2+FL was only ₹2,183 — leaving farmers absorbing a loss of ₹683 per quintal on every sale.*

The MSP is not a guarantee. For 77% of Indian farmers, it is a number they hear on the radio but never receive.

1.2 WHERE THE SUBSIDIES ACTUALLY GO

Every year India spends tens of thousands of crore rupees in agricultural subsidies. The question worth asking is: who receives them?

Government farming subsidies from 1993 to 2018 mostly went to producers and dealers of seeds and fertilizers — not to farmers. In 2017, ₹35,000 crore in loans and subsidies were given to entities in Delhi and Chandigarh — cities that have no farmers. In Maharashtra, 60% of government loans and subsidies went to people residing in Mumbai.*

This is not an aberration. It is the pattern. The subsidy announced for the farmer travels through a chain of intermediaries — seed companies, fertiliser distributors, procurement agencies, storage contractors — and what reaches the farm gate is a fraction of what left the treasury.

1.3 THE PRICE OF POLICY FAILURE: A DEATH EVERY HOUR

Farm policy is not abstract. Its failure has a precise, documented human cost — measured in deaths.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau's 2023 report, 10,786 people in India's agricultural sector died by suicide in 2023 — 4,690 farmers and 6,096 agricultural labourers. This translates to approximately 29 farmers and farm labourers taking their own lives every single day.*

Maharashtra recorded the highest number at 38.5% of all cases, followed by Karnataka at 22.5%. Together, these two states contributed more than 60% of all agricultural suicides in the country.*

The NCRB data itself is widely believed to undercount the true figure. Several states — including West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand — officially reported zero farmer suicides in 2023, a figure that contradicts extensive ground-level reporting by journalists and civil society organisations.

Over 10,000 farmers have died by suicide in India every year for at least three consecutive

years: 2021, 2022, and 2023. This is not a crisis. A crisis gets addressed. This is policy.

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[1] Wikipedia on Minimum Support Price (India), citing NSSO 77th Round Survey data. Source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimum_support_price_\(India\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimum_support_price_(India))

[2] The Statesman, 'The MSP Muddle,' March 30, 2025. [thestatesman.com](https://www.thestatesman.com)

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CHAPTER 2: THE HEALTH ROBBERY

Why the Doctor is Never There When You Need Her

"The greatest wealth is health. The greatest poverty is its absence."

— Ancient Indian proverb

2.1 THE CLINIC THAT EXISTS ONLY ON PAPER

Across rural India, there are Primary Health Centres — government clinics meant to be the first line of defence between a family and a health catastrophe. They appear in government statistics. Their buildings exist. Their budgets are allocated. Their staff positions are sanctioned. But the doctors are not there.

Among states, Chhattisgarh has the highest vacancy rate of doctors at 71%, followed by West Bengal at 44%, Maharashtra at 37%, and Uttar Pradesh at 36% in Primary Health Centres.*

Nationally, as of March 2023, only 38% of sanctioned posts for specialist doctors — surgeons, physicians, obstetricians, gynaecologists, and paediatricians — were filled at Community Health Centres, down from 41% three years earlier.*

A CHC is the first facility in India where a rural patient can access a specialist. When it has no surgeon, a villager with appendicitis travels for hours. When it has no gynaecologist, a mother in labour travels on the back of a motorcycle. Sometimes she arrives in time. Sometimes she does not.

Community Health Centres lacked 83.2% of required surgeons, 74.2% of required obstetricians and gynaecologists, 79.1% of physicians, and 81.6% of required paediatricians nationally. Overall, there is a shortfall of 79.5% of all specialists at CHCs across India.*

2.2 THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WAS NEVER BUILT

As per Rural Health Statistics 2021-22, the numbers of all three types of health centres fall short of targets. Sub-Centres have a shortfall of 25%,

Primary Health Centres a shortfall of 31%, and Community Health Centres a shortfall of 36%. *

These are not new problems. They have been documented, reported to Parliament, and acknowledged by successive governments. They persist not because solutions are unknown, but because the political will to fund them has been repeatedly subordinated to other priorities.

2.3 DECLINING BUDGET, RISING BURDEN

Despite significant gaps in India's healthcare system exposed by COVID-19, the allocation to the Ministry of Health has gradually declined from 2.16% of the total budget in 2019-20 to 1.88% in the 2024-25 budget. The National Health Policy sets a target of spending 2.5% of GDP on healthcare, but the current allocation stands at only 0.27% of GDP. *

Nearly 400 million Indians remain uninsured and financially vulnerable to medical emergencies. Households bear nearly 47% of total medical costs out-of-pocket. *

That 47% figure is worth sitting with. Nearly half of every rupee spent on medicine, tests, hospital beds and doctor consultations in India comes from the patient's own pocket — not from the state that collected taxes to provide it. For a daily wage worker earning ₹400, a single hospitalisation is not a setback. It is a catastrophe that can push an entire family into permanent debt.

India spends 0.27% of GDP on public healthcare. The global average is 6%. The difference, in this country, is measured in preventable deaths.

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CHAPTER 3: THE HUNGER PARADOX

The World's 5th Largest Economy Cannot Feed Its Children

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhuman."
— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

3.1 THE NUMBER THAT SHOULD SHAME A NATION

In the 2025 Global Hunger Index, India ranks 102nd out of 123 countries with sufficient data. With a score of 25.8, India has a level of hunger categorised as 'serious.'^{*}

India's child wasting rate — children who are dangerously underweight for their height — stands at 18.7%. India has the highest rate of child wasting in the world.*

35.5% of children under five in India are stunted — shorter than they should be for their age as a result of chronic undernutrition.*

To understand what these numbers mean, remove the percentages. In a country of 1.4 billion people, where roughly 250 million are children under fourteen, these are not statistical abstractions. They are the bodies of children. They are height measurements taken in anganwadis and scribbled into registers. They are the silence of a child too weakened by hunger to cry.

India ranks below Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka on hunger — all countries with smaller economies and fewer resources. The hunger India has is not a poverty problem. It is a priority problem.

3.2 THE CONTRADICTION AT THE HEART OF INDIAN AGRICULTURE

India is the world's second-largest food producer. India has a food surplus. Grain rots in government warehouses while malnourishment statistics climb. This is not a supply problem. It is a distribution and

prioritisation problem — made worse by the systematic underfunding of the public distribution system and the systematic overfunding of infrastructure projects that benefit connected conglomerates.

Every rupee diverted from the PDS, from MGNREGA, from mid-day meals, from anganwadi nutrition supplements — is a rupee that does not reach the child whose stunting rate we cite in international shame every October when the Global Hunger Index is published.

3.3 MGNREGA — THE SAFETY NET WITH HOLES

While the MGNREGS budget increased from ₹60,000 crore in 2023-24 to ₹86,000 crore in 2024-25, approximately 20% of the current allocation was directed toward clearing pending dues from the previous fiscal year. As of April 2024, funds ran into a negative balance of ₹20,751 crore. Adjusting for this, MGNREGS' actual share of the budget reduces from 1.78% to 1.35%.*

MGNREGA is not welfare. It is a constitutional guarantee — a right to 100 days of work per year for rural households. When its funds are systematically underprovided and its wages arrive months late, the person who suffers is not an abstraction in a policy paper. She is a woman in Bundelkhand who dug a road for a month and has not been paid, who now cannot afford the medicine her child needs.

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CHAPTER 4: THE AIRPORT PRIVATISATION

How Six Profitable Public Airports Were Given to One Company With No Experience

"Public assets built with taxpayer money belong to the public."

— Parliamentary Budget Office Principle

4.1 A CLEAN SWEEP THAT DEFIED THE ODDS

In February 2019, the Airports Authority of India announced that a single corporate group — Adani Enterprises — had won the rights to operate and develop six major Indian airports simultaneously. The airports were in Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Guwahati, and Thiruvananthapuram. The concession period was 50 years.

There were eight other bidders. Established players with decades of airport experience. And yet, Adani — which had never operated a single airport in its history — won all six.

According to documents, the Modi government violated various laws and procedures while arriving at its decision to privatise the six airports owned by the AAI. Recommendations made by the Department of Economic Affairs in the Ministry of Finance and the NITI Aayog on the technical, financial and legal aspects of the bidding process were ignored. Instead, conditions were set up that apparently favoured the Adani Group.*

4.2 THE FINANCE MINISTRY WARNING NOBODY DISCUSSED

Records accessed by The Indian Express show that the Department of Economic Affairs had suggested, in a note dated December 10, 2018, that not more than two airports be given to the same bidder because of the huge financial risk involved. This note was not even discussed at the Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee meeting the following day.*

The rationale for the two-airport cap was sound. When Delhi and Mumbai airports were privatised under the UPA government, the contracts were deliberately split between GMR and GVK to ensure competition, prevent monopoly, and preserve the government's ability to find alternative operators in case of default. That precedent was swept aside.

4.3 PROFITABLE AIRPORTS, BUILT WITH PUBLIC MONEY

Data released in the wake of the decision showed that the six airports were among the highest revenue earners and generators of profit among all the airports operated by India's airport authority. The public-sector airports corporation had already spent approximately AUD \$600 million — roughly ₹3,000 crore — upgrading all six airports in the years before the handover.*

In other words, the Indian taxpayer paid to modernise these airports. Then the government handed the modernised, profitable assets to a private company for 50 years at a per-passenger fee the operator can recover from passengers through user development charges.

4.4 KERALA SAYS NO — AND IS IGNORED

In August 2020, the legislative assembly of Kerala passed a unanimous resolution — across all party lines — protesting the privatisation of Thiruvananthapuram International Airport. The Government of India and the AAI ignored the objections. Kerala took the matter to the Supreme Court. The legal dispute remains unresolved.*

Kerala's finance minister at the time called the decision 'blatant cronyism.' The state government had offered to operate the airport itself. Its offer was not considered.

4.5 WHAT HAPPENED TO USER FEES AFTER PRIVATISATION

Some of the steepest increases in user development fees — charges that are passed on to passengers as part of airfares — have been at the airports won by Adani in privatisation bids. Adani's strategy was to bid aggressively (for example, offering ₹115 per passenger at Mangaluru vs. a competitor's ₹45), then seek compensatory increases from regulator AERA to recoup the fee.*

The Adani Group has denied any wrongdoing and stated that it bid within the rules. What is documented, however, is the impact: the rules were changed before bidding in ways that only one bidder was positioned to exploit, and the regulator's subsequent decisions on user fees effectively transferred the cost of Adani's aggressive bids to ordinary passengers.

Five of the six airports were profitable before privatisation. The taxpayer paid to build them. The passenger pays higher fees after privatisation. So who exactly benefited?

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CHAPTER 5: THE JAL INSOLVENCY — A WINDOW INTO THE SYSTEM

When Two Billionaires Fight, What Does the Ordinary Indian See?

"Transparency is not a courtesy in a democracy. It is a requirement."

— Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, Supreme Court of India

5.1 THE ASSET: WHAT WAS AT STAKE

Jaiprakash Associates Ltd was admitted into the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process in June 2024 after defaulting on loans totalling ₹57,185 crore. Despite its financial distress, JAL held a portfolio of premium assets — prime real estate in Noida and Greater Noida, infrastructure near the upcoming Jewar International Airport, cement manufacturing capacity, power, hospitality, and engineering assets.*

Fifty-seven thousand crore rupees. That is the scale of the default. That money was owed to banks — which means it was owed, ultimately, to depositors, to pension funds, to ordinary Indians whose savings sat behind those loans. When JAL defaulted, the loss was not absorbed by the promoters who ran it into the ground. It was spread across India's financial system.

5.2 THE BIDDING PROCESS AND ITS CONTROVERSY

The resolution process attracted 28 expressions of interest. After evaluation, the Committee of Creditors approved Adani Enterprises' resolution plan with 93.81% voting share. The plan, valued at around ₹14,500 crore, was approved by the NCLT on March 17, 2026.*

Vedanta, represented by Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, argued its revised bid was around ₹3,400 crore higher in gross terms and approximately ₹500 crore more in net present value. Sibal stated: 'I received a letter stating I was the highest, both on substantive terms and on NPV basis.'*

Lenders and the resolution professional denied this characterisation, stating that Vedanta was never officially declared the successful bidder at any stage, and that its improved offer came after the formal deadline.

5.3 WHAT THE CREDITORS SAID — AND WHY

The Solicitor General, defending the CoC's decision, stated that resolution plans are evaluated on multiple parameters — including upfront payment, feasibility, and execution timelines. Adani offered over ₹6,000 crore upfront and promised payment within two years. Vedanta's original proposal spread payments over five years.*

Analysts at Incred Equities noted: 'A higher number does not automatically translate into a winning bid, especially in a time-bound insolvency process.' They also pointed to Vedanta's history of alleged past withdrawals or delays in other insolvency acquisitions as a factor in creditor preference for Adani.*

5.4 WHAT THE HOMEBUYERS SEE

Lost in the billionaire dispute is a quieter tragedy. Jaypee's real estate projects have left thousands of homebuyers holding possession letters for flats they paid for — and never received. Some have waited over a decade. They are not creditors in the technical sense that banks are. In the IBC framework, they have historically been at the back of the queue.

For these buyers — middle-class families who sank their life savings into a Jaypee flat — the insolvency process is not an abstract legal proceeding. It is the question of whether they will ever live in the home they paid for, or whether that money will be consumed by the resolution of debts owed to institutions incomparably more powerful than they are.

28 companies showed interest in JAL's assets. The process that followed raises questions not just about who won — but about whether the rules of the game were written before the game began.

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CONCLUSION: THE RECKONING

What a Democracy Owes Its Citizens — and What to Do Next

We have travelled, in this book, from the Budget documents in Delhi to the anganwadi in Chhattisgarh. From the NCLT courtroom to the ration shop that ran out on the 20th. From the airport terminal with rising user fees to the Primary Health Centre with no surgeon.

The thread connecting all of these is not conspiracy. It is priority. A democracy makes choices about whose needs matter most. Those choices are visible in budget allocations, in contract award criteria, in the rules written before bidding begins, in the footnotes of CAG reports that Parliament rarely discusses.

The farmer does not need sympathy. She needs MSP at cost-plus-fifty. The child does not need charity. He needs a functioning anganwadi. The patient does not need prayers. She needs a doctor who is actually there.

WHAT CITIZENS CAN DO — LEGALLY, TODAY

First: File RTIs. The Right to Information Act gives every Indian citizen the power to ask government departments for documents, tender evaluations, budget utilisation data, and contractor names. The Airport Authority of India, the Ministry of Coal, SECI, and every state health department are subject to RTI. The portal is rtionline.gov.in. It costs ₹10.

Second: Read CAG reports. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India publishes free, publicly available audit reports on nearly every government scheme and major contract. The 2012 Coalgate report, health scheme audits, Jal Jeevan Mission performance audits — all are available at cag.gov.in. Most Indians have never read one.

Third: Track your MP. Every parliamentary question, every vote, every debate is recorded at sansad.in. Citizens have the right to know whether

their elected representative asked uncomfortable questions — or stayed silent.

Fourth: Support ground journalism. The investigations that documented the airport bid irregularities, the farmer income gap, the health infrastructure shortfall — these were done by journalists at The Wire, Newsclick, Down To Earth, and the People's Archive of Rural India. They need readers and support.

This book is a beginning, not an end. Every claim here is cited. Every citation is verifiable. Every data point is a door — and behind each door is a person whose life was shaped by a decision made in a room they were never invited into.

The citizen is the employer. It is time to act like one.

— *End* —

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